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# RETHINKING CRITICAL THEORY AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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## Our Idiosyncratic Interpretation of Critical Theory and Critical Research

Over the past 25 years of our involvement in critical theory and critical research, we have been asked by hundreds of people to explain more precisely what critical theory is. We find that question difficult to answer because (a) there are many critical theories, not just one; (b) the critical tradition is always changing and evolving; and (c) critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists. To lay out a set of fixed characteristics of the position is contrary to the desire of such theorists to avoid the production of blueprints of sociopolitical and epistemological beliefs. Given these disclaimers, we will now attempt to provide one idiosyncratic "take" on the nature of critical theory and critical research in the first decade of the 21st century. Please note that this is merely our subjective analysis and that there are many brilliant critical theorists who will find many problems with our pronouncements. In this spirit, we tender a description of an ever-evolving criticality, a reconceptualized critical theory that was critiqued and overhauled by the "post-discourses" of the last quarter of the 20th century and has been further extended in the first years of the 21st century (Bauman, 1995; Carlson & Apple, 1998; Collins, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Kellner, 1995; Peters, Lankshear, & Olssen, 2003; Roman & Eyre, 1997; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998; Weil & Kincheloe, 2003).

In this context, a reconceptualized critical theory questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the nations in the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free. Over the 20th century, especially after the early 1960s, individuals in these societies were acculturated to feel comfortable in relations of domination and subordination rather than equality and independence. Given the social and technological changes of the last half of the century that led to new forms of information production and access, critical theorists argued that questions of self-direction and democratic egalitarianism should be reassessed. In this context, critical researchers informed by the "post-discourses" (e.g., postmodern, critical feminism, poststructuralism) came to understand that

individuals' view of themselves and the world were even more influenced by social and historical forces than previously believed. Given the changing social and informational conditions of late 20th-century and early 21st-century media-saturated Western culture, critical theorists have needed new ways of researching and analyzing the construction of individuals (Agger, 1992; Flossner & Otto, 1998; Hinchey, 1998; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996; Quail, Razzano, & Skalli, 2004; Skalli, 2004; R. Smith & Wexler, 1995; Sünker, 1998; Wesson & Weaver, 2001).

## Partisan Research in a "Neutral" Academic Culture

In the space available here, it is impossible to do justice to all of the critical traditions that have drawn inspiration from Marx; Kant; Hegel; Weber; the Frankfurt School theorists; Continental social theorists such as Foucault, Habermas, and Derrida; Latin American thinkers such as Paulo Freire; French feminists such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous; or Russian sociolinguists such as Bakhtin and Vygotsky—most of whom regularly find their way into the reference lists of contemporary critical researchers. Today there are criticalist schools in many fields, and even a superficial discussion of the most prominent of these schools would demand much more space than we have available.

The fact that numerous books have been written about the often-virulent disagreements among members of the Frankfurt School only heightens our concern with the "packaging" of the different criticalist schools. Critical theory should not be treated as a universal grammar of revolutionary thought objectified and reduced to discrete formulaic pronouncements or strategies. Obviously, in presenting our idiosyncratic version of a reconceptualized critical theory or an evolving criticality, we have defined the critical tradition very broadly for the purpose of generating understanding; as we asserted earlier, this will trouble many critical researchers. In this move, we decided to focus on the underlying commonality among critical schools of thought, at the cost of focusing on differences. This, of course, is always risky business in terms of suggesting a false unity or consensus where none exists, but such concerns are unavoidable in a survey chapter such as this.

We are defining a criticalist as a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

In today's climate of blurred disciplinary genres, it is not uncommon to find literary theorists doing anthropology and anthropologists writing about literary theory, political scientists trying their hand at ethnomethodological analysis, or philosophers doing Lacanian film criticism. All these inter-/cross-disciplinary moves are examples of what Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000) have referred to as bricolage—a key innovation, we argue, in an evolving criticality. We will explore this dynamic in relation to critical research later in this chapter. We offer this observation about blurred genres not as an excuse to be wantonly eclectic in our treatment of the critical tradition but to make the point that any attempts

to delineate critical theory as discrete schools of analysis will fail to capture the evolving hybridity endemic to contemporary critical analysis (Kincheloe, 2001a; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

Readers familiar with the criticalist traditions will recognize essentially four different "emergent" schools of social inquiry in this chapter: the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory associated most closely with the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse; the genealogical writings of Michel Foucault; the practices of poststructuralist deconstruction associated with Derrida; and postmodernist currents associated with Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Ebert, and others. In our view, critical ethnography has been influenced by all these perspectives in different ways and to different degrees. From critical theory, researchers inherit a forceful criticism of the positivist conception of science and instrumental rationality, especially in Adorno's idea of negative dialectics, which posits an unstable relationship of contradiction between concepts and objects; from Derrida, researchers are given a means for deconstructing objective truth, or what is referred to as "the metaphysics of presence."

For Derrida, the meaning of a word is constantly deferred because the word can have meaning only in relation to its difference from other words within a given system of language. Foucault invites researchers to explore the ways in which discourses are implicated in relations of power and how power and knowledge serve as dialectically reinitiating practices that regulate what is considered reasonable and true. We have characterized much of the work influenced by these writers as the "ludic" and "resistance" postmodernist theoretical perspectives. Critical research can be understood best in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name "critical" must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guardrail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world (Grinberg, 2003; Horn, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001b).

The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is instructive in relation to constructing research that contributes to the struggle for a better world. The research of both authors of this chapter has been influenced profoundly by the work of Freire (1970, 1972, 1978, 1985). Always concerned with human suffering and the pedagogical and knowledge work that helped expose the genesis of it, Freire modeled critical research throughout his career. In his writings about research, Freire maintained that there are no traditionally defined objects of his research—he insisted on involving, as partners in the research process, the people he studied as subjects. He immersed himself in their ways of thinking and modes of perception, encouraging them all along to begin thinking about their own thinking. Everyone involved in Freire's critical research, not just the researcher, joined in the process of investigation, examination, criticism, and reinvestigation—everyone learned to see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognize the forces that subtly shape their lives.

Whereas traditional researchers see their task as the description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself. Horkheimer (1972) puts it succinctly when he argues that critical theory and research are never satisfied with merely increasing knowledge (see also Agger, 1998; Andersen, 1989; Britzman, 1991; Giroux, 1983, 1988, 1997; Kincheloe, 1991, 2003c; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993; Quantz, 1992; Shor, 1996; Villaverde & Kincheloe, 1998). Research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism—self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims. Thus, critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the

epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site.

Upon detailed analysis, critical researchers may change these assumptions. Stimulus for change may come from the critical researchers' recognition that such assumptions are not leading to emancipatory actions. The source of this emancipatory action involves the researchers' ability to expose the contradictions of the world of appearances accepted by the dominant culture as natural and inviolable (Giroux, 1983, 1988, 1997; McLaren, 1992, 1997; San Juan, 1992; Zizek, 1990). Such appearances may, critical researchers contend, conceal social relationships of inequality, injustice, and exploitation. For instance, if we view the violence we find in classrooms not as random or isolated incidents created by aberrant individuals willfully stepping out of line in accordance with a particular form of social pathology, but as possible narratives of transgression and resistance, then this could indicate that the "political unconscious" lurking beneath the surface of everyday classroom life is not unrelated to practices of race, class, and gender oppression but rather intimately connected to them.

## An Evolving Criticality

In this context, it is important to note that we understand a social theory as a map or a guide to the social sphere. In a research context, it does not determine how we see the world but helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it. A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003; Flecha, Gomez, & Puigvert, 2003). Thus, in this context we seek to provide a view of an evolving criticality or a reconceptualized critical theory. Critical theory is never static; it is always evolving, changing in light of both new theoretical insights and new problems and social circumstances.

The list of concepts elucidating our articulation of critical theory indicates a criticality informed by a variety of discourses emerging after the work of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, some of the theoretical discourses, while referring to themselves as critical, directly call into question some of the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse. Thus, diverse theoretical traditions have informed our understanding of criticality and have demanded understanding of diverse forms of oppression including class, race, gender, sexual, cultural, religious, colonial, and ability-related concerns. The evolving notion of criticality we present is informed by, while critiquing, the post-discourses—for example, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. In this context, critical theorists become detectives of new theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience.

In this context, criticality and the research it supports are always evolving, always encountering new ways to irritate dominant forms of power, to provide more evocative and compelling insights. Operating in this way, an evolving criticality is always vulnerable to exclusion from the domain of approved modes of research. The forms of social change it supports always position it in some places as an outsider, an awkward detective always interested in uncovering social structures, discourses, ideologies, and epistemologies that prop up both the status quo and a variety of forms of privilege. In the epistemological domain, white, male, class elitist, heterosexist, imperial, and colonial privilege often operates by asserting the power to claim objectivity and neutrality. Indeed, the owners of such privilege often own the "franchise" on reason and rationality. Proponents of an evolving criticality possess a variety of tools to expose such oppressive power politics. Such proponents assert that critical theory is well-served by drawing upon numerous liberatory discourses and including diverse groups of marginalized peoples and their allies in the nonhierarchical aggregation of critical analysts (Bello, 2003; Clark, 2002; Humphries, 1997).

In the present era, emerging forms of neocolonialism and neo-imperialism in the United States move critical theorists to examine the ways American power operates under the cover of establishing democracies all over the world. Advocates of an evolving criticality argue—as we do in more detail later in this chapter—that such neocolonial power must be exposed so it can be opposed in the United States and around the world. The American Empire's justification in the name of freedom for undermining democratically elected governments from Iran (Kincheloe, 2004), Chile, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to Liberia (when its real purpose is to acquire geopolitical advantage for future military assaults, economic leverage in international markets, and access to natural resources) must be exposed by criticalists for what it is—a rank imperialist sham (McLaren, 2003a, 2003b; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2002; McLaren & Martin, 2003). Critical researchers need to view their work in the context of living and working in a nation-state with the most powerful military-industrial complex in history that is shamefully using the terrorist attacks of September 11 to advance a ruthless imperialist agenda fueled by capitalist accumulation by means of the rule of force (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2003).

Chomsky (2003), for instance, has accused the U.S. government of the "supreme crime" of preventive war (in the case of its invasion of Iraq, the use of military force to destroy an invented or imagined threat) of the type that was condemned at Nuremburg. Others, like historian Arthur Schlesinger (cited in Chomsky, 2003), have likened the invasion of Iraq to Japan's "day of infamy," that is, to the policy that imperial Japan employed at the time of Pearl Harbor. David G. Smith (2003) argues that such imperial dynamics are supported by particular epistemological forms. The United States is an epistemological empire based on a notion of truth that undermines the knowledges produced by those outside the good graces and benevolent authority of the empire. Thus, in the 21st century, critical theorists must develop sophisticated ways to address not only the brute material relations of class rule linked to the mode and relations of capitalist production and imperialist conquest (whether through direct military intervention or indirectly through the creation of client states) but also the epistemological violence that helps discipline the world. Smith refers to this violence as a form of "information warfare" that spreads deliberate falsehoods about countries such as Iraq and Iran. U.S. corporate and governmental agents become more sophisticated in the use of such episto-weaponry with every day that passes.

Obviously, an evolving criticality does not promiscuously choose theoretical discourses to add to the bricolage of critical theories. It is highly suspicious—as we detail later—of theories that fail to understand the malevolent workings of power, that fail to critique the blinders of Eurocentrism, that cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders, and that fail to discern a global system of inequity supported by diverse forms of ideology and violence. It is uninterested in any theory—no matter how fashionable—that does not directly address the needs of victims of oppression and the suffering they must endure. The following is an elastic, ever-evolving set of concepts included in our evolving notion of criticality. With theoretical innovations and shifting zeitgeists, they evolve. The points that are deemed most important in one time period pale in relation to different points in a new era.

*Critical Enlightenment.* In this context, critical theory analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society—identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups, criticalists argue, often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages; the dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical research. Such studies of privilege often revolve around issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Allison, 1998; V. Carter, 1998; Howell, 1998; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998; McLaren, 1997; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). In this context, to seek critical enlightenment is to uncover the

winners and losers in particular social arrangements and the processes by which such power plays operate (Cary, 1996; Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Fehr, 1993; King, 1996; Pruyn, 1994; Wexler, 1996a).

*Critical Emancipation.* Those who seek emancipation attempt to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community. Here, critical research attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. In this way, greater degrees of autonomy and human agency can be achieved. In the first decade of the 21st century, we are cautious in our use of the term "emancipation" because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her. Concurrently, many have used the term "emancipation" to signal the freedom an abstract individual gains by gaining access to Western reason—that is, becoming reasonable. Our use of "emancipation" in an evolving criticality rejects any use of the term in this context. In addition, many have rightly questioned the arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate "others." These are important caveats and must be carefully taken into account by critical researchers. Thus, as critical inquirers who search for those forces that insidiously shape who we are, we respect those who reach different conclusions in their personal journeys (Butler, 1998; Cannella, 1997; Kellogg, 1998; Knobel, 1999; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998; Weil, 1998).

*The Rejection of Economic Determinism.* A caveat of a reconceptualized critical theory involves the insistence that the tradition does not accept the orthodox Marxist notion that "base" determines "superstructure"—meaning that economic factors dictate the nature of all other aspects of human existence. Critical theorists understand in the 21st century that there are multiple forms of power, including the aforementioned racial, gender, and sexual axes of domination. In issuing this caveat, however, a reconceptualized critical theory in no way attempts to argue that economic factors are unimportant in the shaping of everyday life. Economic factors can never be separated from other axes of oppression (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994; Carlson, 1997; Gabbard, 1995; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Gibson, 1986; Kincheloe, 1995, 1999; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999; Martin & Schuman, 1996). Mechanistic formulations of economic determinism are often misreadings of the work of Marx. McLaren's work, for instance, does not reject the base/superstructure model *tout court*, but only undialectical formulations of it (see McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001).

*The Critique of Instrumental or Technical Rationality.* A reconceptualized critical theory sees instrumental/technical rationality as one of the most oppressive features of contemporary society. Such a form of "hyper-reason" involves an obsession with means in preference to ends. Critical theorists claim that instrumental/technical rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its topics to "how to" instead of "why should." In a research context, critical theorists claim that many rationalistic scholars become so obsessed with issues of technique, procedure, and correct method that they forget the humanistic purpose of the research act. Instrumental/technical rationality often separates fact from value in its obsession with "proper" method, losing in the process an understanding of the value choices always involved in the production of so-called facts (Alfino, Caputo, & Wynyard, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, 1993; McLaren, 1998; Ritzer, 1993; Stallabrass, 1996; M. Weinstein, 1998).

*The Concept of Immanence.* Critical theory is always concerned with what could be, what is immanent in various ways of thinking and perceiving. Thus, critical theory should always move beyond the contemplative realm to concrete social reform. In the spirit of Paulo Freire, our notion of an evolving critical theory possesses immanence as it imagines new ways to ease human suffering and produce psychological health (A.M.A. Freire,

2001; Slater, Fain, & Rossatto, 2002). Critical immanence helps us get beyond egocentrism and ethnocentrism and work to build new forms of relationship with diverse peoples. Leila Villaverde (2003) extends this point about immanence when she maintains that critical theory helps us "retain a vision of the not yet." In the work of the Frankfurt School critical theory and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) we find this concern with immanence. Gadamer argues that we must be more cautious in our efforts to determine "what is" because it holds such dramatic consequences for how we engage "what ought to be." In Gadamer's view, the process of understanding involves interpreting meaning and applying the concepts gained to the historical moment that faces us. Thus, immanence in the context of qualitative research involves the use of human wisdom in the process of bringing about a better and more just world, less suffering, and more individual fulfillment. With this notion in mind, critical theorists critique researchers whose scholarly work operates to adapt individuals to the world as it is. In the context of immanence, critical researchers are profoundly concerned with who we are, how we got this way, and where we might go from here (Weil & Kincheloe, 2003).

*A Reconceptualized Critical Theory of Power: Hegemony.* Our conception of a reconceptualized critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness. Power, critical theorists have learned, is an extremely ambiguous topic that demands detailed study and analysis. A consensus seems to be emerging among criticalists that power is a basic constituent of human existence that works to shape the oppressive and productive nature of the human tradition. Indeed, we are all empowered and we are all unempowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our abilities. Because of limited space, we will focus here on critical theory's traditional concern with the oppressive aspects of power, although we understand that an important aspect of critical research focuses on the productive aspects of power—its ability to empower, to establish a critical democracy, to engage marginalized people in the rethinking of their sociopolitical role (Apple, 1996; Fiske, 1993; A.M.A. Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Macedo, 1994; Nicholson & Seidman, 1995). In the context of oppressive power and its ability to produce inequalities and human suffering, Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony is central to critical research. Gramsci understood that dominant power in the 20th century was not always exercised simply by physical force but also was expressed through social psychological attempts to win people's consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church. Gramscian hegemony recognizes that the winning of popular consent is a very complex process and must be researched carefully on a case-by-case basis. Students and researchers of power, educators, sociologists, all of us are hegemonized as our field of knowledge and understanding is structured by a limited exposure to competing definitions of the sociopolitical world. The hegemonic field, with its bounded sociopsychological horizons, garners consent to an inequitable power matrix—a set of social relations that are legitimated by their depiction as natural and inevitable. In this context, critical researchers note that hegemonic consent is never completely established, as it is always contested by various groups with different agendas (Grossberg, 1997; Lull, 1995; McLaren, 1995a, 1995b; McLaren, Hammer, Reilly, & Sholle, 1995; West, 1993). We note here that Gramsci famously understood Marx's concept of laws of tendency as implying a new immanence and a new conception of necessity and freedom that cannot be grasped within a mechanistic model of determination (Bensaid, 2002).

*A Reconceptualized Critical Theory of Power: Ideology.* Critical theorists understand that the formation of hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology. If hegemony is the larger effort of the powerful to win the consent of their "subordinates," then ideological hegemony involves the cultural forms, the meanings, the

rituals, and the representations that produce consent to the status quo and individuals' particular places within it. Ideology vis-à-vis hegemony moves critical inquirers beyond explanations of domination that have used terms such as "propaganda" to describe the ways media, political, educational, and other sociocultural productions coercively manipulate citizens to adopt oppressive meanings. A reconceptualized critical research endorses a much more subtle, ambiguous, and situationally specific form of domination that refuses the propaganda model's assumption that people are passive, easily manipulated victims. Researchers operating with an awareness of this hegemonic ideology understand that dominant ideological practices and discourses shape our vision of reality (Lemke, 1995, 1998). Thus, our notion of hegemonic ideology is a critical form of epistemological constructivism buoyed by a nuanced understanding of power's complicity in the constructions people make of the world and their role in it (Kincheloe, 1998). Such an awareness corrects earlier delineations of ideology as a monolithic, unidirectional entity that was imposed on individuals by a secret cohort of ruling-class czars. Understanding domination in the context of concurrent struggles among different classes, racial and gender groups, and sectors of capital, critical researchers of ideology explore the ways such competition engages different visions, interests, and agendas in a variety of social locales—venues previously thought to be outside the domain of ideological struggle (Brosio, 1994; Steinberg, 2001).

*A Reconceptualized Critical Theory of Power: Linguistic/Discursive Power.* Critical researchers have come to understand that language is not a mirror of society. It is an unstable social practice whose meaning shifts, depending upon the context in which it is used. Contrary to previous understandings, critical researchers appreciate the fact that language is not a neutral and objective conduit of description of the "real world." Rather, from a critical perspective, linguistic descriptions are not simply about the world but serve to construct it. With these linguistic notions in mind, criticalists begin to study the way language in the form of discourses serves as a form of regulation and domination. Discursive practices are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant. In an educational context, for example, legitimated discourses of power insidiously tell educators what books may be read by students, what instructional methods may be utilized, and what belief systems and views of success may be taught. In all forms of research, discursive power validates particular research strategies, narrative formats, and modes of representation. In this context, power discourses undermine the multiple meanings of language, establishing one correct reading that implants a particular hegemonic/ideological message into the consciousness of the reader. This is a process often referred to as the attempt to impose discursive closure. Critical researchers interested in the construction of consciousness are very attentive to these power dynamics. Engaging and questioning the use value of particular theories of power is central to our notion of an evolving criticality (Blades, 1997; Gee, 1996; Lemke, 1993; McWilliam & Taylor, 1996; Morgan, 1996; Steinberg, 2001).

*Focusing on the Relationships Among Culture, Power, and Domination.* In the last decades of the 20th century, culture took on a new importance in the critical effort to understand power and domination. Critical researchers have argued that culture has to be viewed as a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1997; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Dominant and subordinate cultures deploy differing systems of meaning based on the forms of knowledge produced in their cultural domain. Popular culture, with its TV, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and other productions, plays an increasingly important role in critical research on power and domination. Cultural studies, of course, occupies an ever-expanding role in this

context, as it examines not only popular culture but also the tacit rules that guide cultural production. Arguing that the development of mass media has changed the way the culture operates, cultural studies researchers maintain that cultural epistemologies in the first decade of the 21st century are different from those of only a few decades ago. New forms of culture and cultural domination are produced as the distinction between the real and the simulated is blurred. This blurring effect of hyperreality constructs a social vertigo characterized by a loss of touch with traditional notions of time, community, self, and history. New structures of cultural space and time generated by bombarding electronic images from local, national, and international spaces shake our personal sense of place. This proliferation of signs and images functions as a mechanism of control in contemporary Western societies. The key to successful counterhegemonic cultural research involves (a) the ability to link the production of representations, images, and signs of hyperreality to power in the political economy and (b) the capacity, once this linkage is exposed and described, to delineate the highly complex effects of the reception of these images and signs on individuals located at various race, class, gender, and sexual coordinates in the web of reality (R. Carter, 2003; Cary, 2003; Ferguson & Golding, 1997; Garnham, 1997; Grossberg, 1995; Jackson & Russo, 2002; Joyrich, 1996; O'Riley, 2003; Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Sanders-Bustle, 2003; Steinberg, 1997a, 1997b; Thomas, 1997; Wexler, 2000).

*The Centrality of Interpretation: Critical Hermeneutics.* One of the most important aspects of a critical theory–informed qualitative research involves the often-neglected domain of the interpretation of information. The critical hermeneutic tradition (Grondin, 1994; Gross & Keith, 1997; Rosen, 1987; Vattimo, 1994) holds that in qualitative research, there is only interpretation, no matter how vociferously many researchers may argue that the facts speak for themselves. The hermeneutic act of interpretation involves, in its most elemental articulation, making sense of what has been observed in a way that communicates understanding. Not only is all research merely an act of interpretation, but, hermeneutics contends, perception itself is an act of interpretation. Thus, the quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, as encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense. The same, however, is also the case with the familiar. Indeed, as in the study of commonly known texts, we come to find that sometimes the familiar may be seen as the most strange. Thus, it should not be surprising that even the so-called objective writings of qualitative research are interpretations, not value-free descriptions (Denzin, 1994; Gallagher, 1992; Jardine, 1998; Mayers, 2001; D. G. Smith, 1999). Learning from the hermeneutic tradition and the postmodern critique, critical researchers have begun to reexamine textual claims to authority. No pristine interpretation exists—indeed, no methodology, social or educational theory, or discursive form can claim a privileged position that enables the production of authoritative knowledge. Researchers must always speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world, "in relation to . . ." As creatures of the world, we are oriented to it in a way that prevents us from grounding our theories and perspectives outside it. The critical hermeneutics that grounds critical qualitative research moves more in the direction of a normative hermeneutics in that it raises questions about the purposes and procedures of interpretation. In its critical theory–driven context, the purpose of hermeneutical analysis is to develop a form of cultural criticism revealing power dynamics within social and cultural texts. Qualitative researchers familiar with critical hermeneutics build bridges between reader and text, text and its producer, historical context and present, and one particular social circumstance and another. Accomplishing such interpretive tasks is difficult, and researchers situated in normative hermeneutics push ethnographers, historians, semioticians, literary critics, and content analysts to trace the bridge-building processes employed by successful interpretations of knowledge production and culture (Gallagher, 1992; Kellner, 1995; Kogler, 1996; Rapko, 1998). Grounded by this hermeneutical bridge building,

critical researchers in a hermeneutical circle (a process of analysis in which interpreters seek the historical and social dynamics that shape textual interpretation) engage in the back-and-forth of studying parts in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to parts. Deploying such a methodology, critical researchers can produce profound insights that lead to transformative action (Berger, 1995; Cary, 1996; Clough, 1998; Coben,1998; Gadamer, 1989; Goodson, 1997; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Miller & Hodge, 1998; Mullen, 1999; Peters & Lankshear, 1994).

*The Role of Cultural Pedagogy in Critical Theory.* Cultural production often can be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity. From our perspective, such a framing can help critical researchers make sense of the world of domination and oppression as they work to bring about a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. In recent years, this educational dynamic has been referred to as cultural pedagogy (Berry, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 1995; McLaren, 1997; Pailliotet, 1998; Semali, 1998; Soto, 1998). "Pedagogy" is a useful term that traditionally has been used to refer only to teaching and schooling. By using the term "cultural pedagogy," we are specifically referring to the ways particular cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing. In our critical interpretive context, our notion of cultural pedagogy asserts that the new "educators" in the electronically wired contemporary era are those who possess the financial resources to use mass media. This corporate-dominated pedagogical process has worked so well that few complain about it in the first decade of the 21st century—such informational politics doesn't make the evening news. Can we imagine another institution in contemporary society gaining the pedagogical power that corporations now assert over information and signification systems? What if the Church of Christ was sufficiently powerful to run pedagogical "commercials" every few minutes on TV and radio touting the necessity for everyone to accept that denomination's faith? Replayed scenes of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Methodists being condemned to hell if they rejected the official pedagogy (the true doctrine) would greet North Americans and their children 7 days a week. There is little doubt that many people would be outraged and would organize for political action. Western societies have to some degree capitulated to this corporate pedagogical threat to democracy, passively watching an elite gain greater control over the political system and political consciousness via a sophisticated cultural pedagogy. Critical researchers are intent on exposing the specifics of this process (Deetz, 1993; Drummond, 1996; Kincheloe, 2002; Molnar, 1996; Pfeil, 1995; Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997).

## Critical Research and Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field that functions within the dynamics of competing definitions of culture. Unlike traditional humanistic studies, cultural studies questions the equation of culture with high culture; instead, cultural studies asserts that myriad expressions of cultural production should be analyzed in relation to other cultural dynamics and social and historical structures. Such a position commits cultural studies to a potpourri of artistic, religious, political, economic, and communicative activities. In this context, it is important to note that although cultural studies is associated with the study of popular culture, it is not primarily about popular culture. The interests of cultural studies are much broader and generally tend to involve the production and nature of the rules of inclusivity and exclusivity that guide academic evaluation—in particular, the way these rules shape and are shaped by relations of power. The rules that guide academic evaluation are inseparable from the rules of knowledge production and research. Thus, cultural studies provides a disciplinary critique that holds many implications (Abercrombie, 1994; Ferguson & Golding, 1997; Grossberg, 1995; Hall & du Gay, 1996; Kincheloe, 2002; McLaren, 1995a; Oberhardt, 2001; Woodward, 1997).

One of the most important sites of theoretical production in the history of critical research has been the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Attempting to connect critical theory with the particularity of everyday experience, the CCCS researchers have argued that all experience is vulnerable to ideological inscription. At the same time, they have maintained that theorizing outside everyday experience results in formal and deterministic theory. An excellent representative of the CCCS's perspectives is Paul Willis, whose *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* was published in 1977, 7 years after Colin Lacey's *Hightown Grammar* (1970). Redefining the nature of ethnographic research in a critical manner, *Learning to Labour* inspired a spate of critical studies: David Robins and Philip Cohen's *Knuckle Sandwich: Growing Up in the Working-Class City* in 1978, Paul Corrigan's *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* in 1979, and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in 1979. Also following Willis's work were critical feminist studies, including an anthology titled *Women Take Issue* (Women's Studies Group, 1978). In 1985, Christine Griffin published *Typical Girls?*, the first extended feminist study produced by the CCCS. Conceived as a response to Willis's *Learning to Labour*, *Typical Girls?* analyzes adolescent female consciousness as it is constructed in a world of patriarchy. Through their recognition of patriarchy as a major disciplinary technology in the production of subjectivity, Griffin and the members of the CCCS gender study group moved critical research in a multicultural direction.

In addition to the examination of class, gender and racial analyses are beginning to gain in importance (Quantz, 1992). Poststructuralism frames power not simply as one aspect of a society but as the basis of society. Thus, patriarchy is not simply one isolated force among many with which women must contend; patriarchy informs all aspects of the social and effectively shapes women's lives (see also Douglas, 1994; Finders, 1997; Fine, Powell, Weis, & Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Franz & Stewart, 1994; Shohat & Stam, 1994). Cornel West (1993) pushes critical research even further into the multicultural domain as he focuses critical attention on women, the Third World, and race. Adopting theoretical advances in neo-Marxist postcolonialist criticism and cultural studies, he is able to shed greater light on the workings of power in everyday life.

In this context, Ladislaus Semali and Joe Kincheloe, in *What Is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy* (1999), explore the power of indigenous knowledge as a resource for critical attempts to bring about social change. Critical researchers, they argue, should analyze such knowledges in order to understand emotions, sensitivities, and epistemologies that move in ways unimagined by many Western knowledge producers. In this postcolonially informed context, Semali and Kincheloe employ concerns raised by indigenous knowledge to challenge the academy, its "normal science," and its accepted notions of certified information. Moving the conversation about critical research in new directions, these authors understand the conceptual inseparability of valuing indigenous knowledge, developing postcolonial forms of resistance, academic reform, the reconceptualization of research and interpretation, and the struggle for social justice.

In *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, Peter McLaren (1999) integrates poststructuralist, postcolonialist, and Marxist theory with the projects of cultural studies, critical pedagogy, and critical ethnography. He grounds his theoretical analysis in the poststructuralist claim that the connection of signifier and signified is arbitrary yet shaped by historical, cultural, and economic forces. The primary cultural narrative that defines school life is the resistance by students to the school's attempts to marginalize their street culture and street knowledge. McLaren analyzes the school as a cultural site where symbolic capital is struggled over in the form of ritual dramas. *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* adopts the position that researchers are unable to grasp themselves or others introspectively without social mediation through their positionalities with respect to race, class, gender, and other configurations. The visceral, bodily forms of knowledge, and the rhythms and gestures of the street

culture of the students, are distinguished from the formal abstract knowledge of classroom instruction. The teachers regard knowledge as it is constructed informally outside the culture of school instruction as threatening to the universalist and decidedly Eurocentric ideal of high culture that forms the basis of the school curriculum.

As critical researchers pursue the reconceptualization of critical theory pushed by its synergistic relationship with cultural studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, they are confronted with the post-discourses' redefinition of critical notions of democracy in terms of multiplicity and difference. Traditional notions of community often privilege unity over diversity in the name of Enlightenment values. Poststructuralists in general and poststructuralist feminists in particular see this communitarian dream as politically disabling because of the suppression of race, class, and gender differences and the exclusion of subaltern voices and marginalized groups whom community members are loath to engage. What begins to emerge in this instance is the movement of feminist theoretical concerns to the center of critical theory. Indeed, after the feminist critique, critical theory can never return to a paradigm of inquiry in which the concept of social class is antiseptically privileged and exalted as the master concept in the Holy Trinity of race, class, and gender.

A critical theory reconceptualized by poststructuralism and feminism promotes a politics of difference that refuses to pathologize or exoticize the Other. In this context, communities are more prone to revitalization and revivification (Wexler, 1996b, 1997); peripheralized groups in the thrall of a condescending Eurocentric gaze are able to edge closer to the borders of respect, and "classified" objects of research potentially acquire the characteristics of subjecthood. Kathleen Weiler's *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class, and Power* (1988) serves as a good example of critical research framed by feminist theory. Weiler shows not only how feminist theory can extend critical research but also how the concept of emancipation can be reconceptualized in light of a feminist epistemology. In this context, we clearly observe the way our notion of an evolving criticality operates. Criticalists inform poststructuralists and feminists, who in turn critique and extend the subject matter and the approach of more traditional forms of critical research. Though not always without contention, such a process is in the long-term interests of a vibrant critical theory that continues to matter in the world (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Behar & Gordon, 1995; Bersani, 1995; Brents & Monson, 1998; Britzman, 1995; Christian-Smith & Keelor, 1999; Clatterbaugh, 1997; Clough, 1994; Cooper, 1994; Hedley, 1994; Johnson, 1996; Kelly, 1996; King & Mitchell, 1995; Lugones, 1987; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Morrow, 1991; Rand, 1995; Scott, 1992; Sedgwick, 1995; Steinberg, 1997b; I. Young, 1990).

In the last few years, Norman Denzin (2003) has initiated a major turn in cultural studies with his notion of a performative ethnography. As a critical and emancipatory discourse, a performative cultural studies connects Giroux's, McLaren's, and Kincheloe's articulations of critical pedagogy with new ways of writing and performing cultural politics. Denzin carefully argues that performance-based human disciplines can catalyze democratic social change. Moving like the coyote trickster, Denzin proposes a cultural studies of action that decenters subjectivity as it questions the status quo. Defining performance as an "act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency" (p. 9), Denzin shapes his notion of performativity in the spirit of Henry Giroux's (2003) work in cultural studies and critical pedagogy. Performance in cultural studies becomes public pedagogy when it employs the aesthetic and performative in the effort to portray the interactions connecting politics, institutions, and experience. Thus, performance for Denzin becomes a form of human agency that brings individuals together with culture in an enacted manner.

Denzin's important ideas intersect with Peter Reason and William Torbert's (2001) concept of the action turn. In the action turn, Reason and Torbert reconceptualize the nature and purpose of social science. Because human beings, they tell us,

> are all participating actors in the world, the purpose of inquiry is not simply or even primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, to deconstruct taken-for-granted realities, or even

> to develop emancipatory theory, but rather to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes directly to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part. (p. 2)

In this context, we find an intersection between Denzin's performativity and the shift to action from social science's emphasis on abstract knowledge. In both articulations, the focus of social research is critical, as it focuses on the improvement of the human condition, community development, and the strengthening of the ecosystems in which people and communities operate. In this spirit, Denzin, in *Performative Ethnography* (2003), uses racism as an example of a problem that can be addressed by a critical performative social science. Connecting his work to the research of W.E.B. DuBois and bell hooks, Denzin seeks to write and perform cultural dynamics around race in innovative ways. In this context, he positions political acts as pedagogical and performative. In this way, the researcher opens fresh venues for democratic citizenship and transformative dialogue. In light of the racial violence of the contemporary era, Denzin applies his performative ethnography to help us imagine alternative social realities, new modes of discourse, and fresh experiences in schools, workplaces, wilderness areas, and other public spaces.

Thus, Denzin pushes cultural studies and its attendant criticality that moves from textual ethnography to a performative autoethnography, while connecting it to critical pedagogy's concept of making the political more pedagogical and the pedagogical more political. Critical in the way it confronts mainstream ways of knowing and representing the world, Denzin's performativity is better tailored to engage postcolonial and subaltern cultural practices. In addition to connecting to the action turn in research documented by Reason and Torbert, Denzin's performativity also connects to Humberto Mautaurana and Francisco Varela's Santiago school of Enactivism in cognitive theory. If performance ethnography and cultural studies highlight immediacy and involvement, then Enactivism's concern with the importance of *enacting* cognition in the complexity and complications of lived experience can possibly synergize our insights into the realm of performance. With the help of the social, pedagogical, political, and cognitive theories, critical researchers begin to understand that the social world may be more complex than we have been taught. Denzin's performativity helps us get closer to this complexity.

This interaction connecting performance ethnography, the action turn, and Enactivism moves critical researchers to explore their work in relation to recent inquiry about our evolving view of the human mind. Looking at the concept of mind from biological, psychological, and social perspectives, Enactivists begin the reparation process necessitated by the Western rationalistic abstraction, reduction, and fragmentation of the world. When Enactivism is added to our notion of an evolving criticality, we emerge with a powerful grounding for a reconceptualization of the research act. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1993, 1996, 1999) and numerous other cognitive theorists have argued, in the spirit of Lev Vygotsky, over the last two decades, that cognition and the knowledge it produces are socially situated activities that take place in concrete historical situations (Kincheloe, 2003b). Varela adds to this description, arguing that it is in the particular historical circumstance that we realize who we are and what we can become. Indeed, we realize our cognitive capabilities in the specific concrete circumstance while concurrently gaining the power to imagine what capabilities we can develop.

As criticalists engage Denzin's performativity, the action turn, and Enactivist principles of systemic self-organization (autopoiesis), critical research moves into a new zone of emergent complexity. In this context, when advocates of a critical form of inquiry use the term "transformative action," they gain a deeper sense of what this might mean using the enactivist concept of readiness-for-action. Knowledge must be enacted—understood at the level of human beings' affect and intellect. In a critical context, the knowledge we produce must be enacted in light of our individual and collective struggles. Without this dimension, the research act becomes a rather abstract enterprise. Nothing new *emerges*,

as knowledges and concepts are merely produced rather than related to one another and enacted (performed) in the world. In this enacted context, Denzin argues, cultural studies develops a new way of encountering the cosmos. Epistemological notions of performance and performativity enter into a dynamic tension between doing and the done, the saying and the said. In this productive tension, distance and detachment are overcome in the act of performing. Improvisation, a key dynamic in all these intersecting discourses of inquiry, constructs the moment where resistance emerges, where the doing and the done merge.

In this performative, action-oriented moment, criticalists escape the confines of the stale debate between positivist empiricism and postmodern interpretivism. A new dawn breaks for our evolving criticality and research in cultural studies, as researchers study themselves in relation to others in the effort to produce a practical form of knowledge represented in an action-oriented, performative manner. A new performative, action-oriented, and Enactivist-informed paradigm helps critical researchers develop new ways of inquiring in action-based everyday interactions and lived processes. These interactions and processes are always "sensuous and contingent," Denzin notes. In order for an ethnographer or cultural studies researcher to represent such dynamics, new modes of research are necessary. By definition, the performative ethnography that Denzin offers shatters the textual conventions that traditionally have operated to represent lived experiences. Critical ethnography and cultural studies will never be the same after performativity and the participatory epistemology on which it is based explode the boundaries of acceptable research practice.

## Critical Research Encounters the Bricolage

Using the concept of bricolage, as articulated by the editors of this handbook, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Joe Kincheloe develops the notion as an extension of the concept of evolving criticality developed in this chapter. Lincoln and Denzin use the term in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and his lengthy discussion of it in *The Savage Mind*. The French word *bricoleur* describes a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task (Harper, 1987). Some connotations of the term involve trickery and cunning and remind me of the chicanery of Hermes, in particular his ambiguity concerning the messages of the gods. If hermeneutics came to connote the ambiguity and slipperiness of textual meaning, then bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research. Indeed, as cultural studies of science have indicated, all scientific inquiry is jerry-rigged to a degree; science, as we all know by now, is not nearly as clean, simple, and procedural as scientists would have us believe. Maybe this is an admission that many in our field would wish to keep in the closet.

In the first decade of the 21st century, bricolage typically is understood to involve the process of employing these methodological strategies as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation. While this interdisciplinary feature is central to any notion of the bricolage, critical qualitative researchers must go beyond this dynamic. Pushing to a new conceptual terrain, such an eclectic process raises numerous issues that researchers must deal with in order to maintain theoretical coherence and epistemological innovation. Such multidisciplinarity demands a new level of research self-consciousness and awareness of the numerous contexts in which any researcher is operating. As one labors to expose the various structures that covertly shape our own and other scholars' research narratives, the bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history. Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the critical researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge.

In this context, bricoleurs move into the domain of complexity. The bricolage exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world and the complications of power. Indeed, it is grounded on an epistemology of complexity. One dimension of this complexity can be illustrated by the relationship between research and the domain of social theory. All observations of the world are shaped either consciously or unconsciously by social theory—such theory provides the framework that highlights or erases what might be observed. Theory in a modernist empiricist mode is a way of understanding that operates without variation in every context. Because theory is a cultural and linguistic artifact, its interpretation of the object of its observation is inseparable from the historical dynamics that have shaped it. The task of the bricoleur is to attack this complexity, uncovering the invisible artifacts of power and culture, and documenting the nature of their influence on not only their own works but on scholarship in general. In this process, bricoleurs act upon the concept that theory is not an explanation of nature—it is more an explanation of our relation to nature.

In its hard labors in the domain of complexity, the bricolage views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the "correct," universally applicable methodologies. Avoiding modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis, bricoleurs also steer clear of preexisting guidelines and checklists developed outside the specific demands of the inquiry at hand. In its embrace of complexity, the bricolage constructs a far more active role for humans both in shaping reality and in creating the research processes and narratives that represent it. Such an active agency rejects deterministic views of social reality that assume the effects of particular social, political, economic, and educational processes. At the same time and in the same conceptual context, this belief in active human agency refuses standardized modes of knowledge production (Bresler & Ardichvili, 2002; Dahlbom, 1998; Mathie & Greene, 2002; McLeod, 2000; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; T. Young & Yarbrough, 1993).

Some of the best work in the study of social complexity is now taking place in the qualitative inquiry of numerous fields including sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, literary studies, marketing, geography, media studies, informatics, library studies, women's studies, various ethnic studies, education, and nursing. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) are acutely aware of these dynamics and refer to them in the context of their delineation of the bricolage. Yvonna Lincoln (2001), in her response to Kincheloe's development of the bricolage, maintains that the most important border work between disciplines is taking place in feminism and race-ethnic studies.

In many ways, there is a form of instrumental reason, of rational irrationality, in the use of passive, external, monological research methods. In the active bricolage, we bring our understanding of the research context together with our previous experience with research methods. Using these knowledges, we *tinker* in the Levi-Straussian sense with our research methods in field-based and interpretive contexts. This tinkering is a high-level cognitive process involving construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation, and readjustment. Researchers' interactions with the objects of their inquiries, bricoleurs understand, are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and, of course, complex. Such conditions negate the practice of planning research strategies in advance. In lieu of such rationalization of the process, bricoleurs enter into the research act as methodological negotiators. Always respecting the demands of the task at hand, the bricolage, as conceptualized here, resists its placement in concrete as it promotes its elasticity. Critical researchers are better informed as to the power of the bricolage in light of Yvonna Lincoln's (2001) delineation of two types of bricoleurs: those who (a) are committed to research eclecticism, allowing circumstance to shape methods employed, and (b) want to engage in the genealogy/archeology of the disciplines with some grander purpose in mind. My purpose entails both of Lincoln's articulations of the role of the bricoleur.

Research method in the bricolage is a concept that receives more respect than in more rationalistic articulations of the term. The rationalistic articulation of method subverts the deconstruction of wide varieties of unanalyzed assumptions embedded in passive methods. Bricoleurs, in their appreciation of the complexity of the research process, view research method as involving far more than procedure. In this mode of analysis, bricoleurs come to understand research method as also a technology of justification, meaning a way of defending what we assert we know and the process by which we know it. Thus, the education of critical researchers demands that everyone take a step back from the process of learning research methods. Such a step back allows us a conceptual distance that produces a critical consciousness. Such a consciousness refuses the passive acceptance of externally imposed research methods that tacitly certify modes justifying knowledges that are decontextualized, reductionistic, and inscribed by dominant modes of power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Foster, 1997; McLeod, 2000).

In its critical concern for just social change, the bricolage seeks insight from the margins of Western societies and the knowledge and ways of knowing of non-Western peoples. Such insight helps bricoleurs reshape and sophisticate social theory, research methods, and interpretive strategies, as they discern new topics to be researched. This confrontation with difference so basic to the concept of the bricolage enables researchers to produce new forms of knowledge that inform policy decisions and political action in general. In gaining this insight from the margins, bricoleurs display once again the blurred boundary between the hermeneutical search for understanding and the critical concern with social change for social justice. Kincheloe has taken seriously Peter McLaren's (2001) important concern—offered in his response to Kincheloe's (2001a) first delineation of his conception of the bricolage—that merely focusing on the production of meanings may not lead to "resisting and transforming the existing conditions of exploitation" (McLaren, 2001, p. 702). In response, Kincheloe maintained that in the critical hermeneutical dimension of the bricolage, the act of understanding power and its effects is merely one part—albeit an inseparable part—of counterhegemonic *action*. Not only are the two orientations not in conflict, they are synergistic (DeVault, 1996; Lutz, Kendall, & Jones, 1997; Soto, 2000; Steinberg, 2001).

To contribute to social transformation, bricoleurs seek to better understand both the forces of domination that affect the lives of individuals from race, class, gender, sexual, ethnic, and religious backgrounds outside of dominant culture(s) and the worldviews of such diverse peoples. In this context, bricoleurs attempt to remove knowledge production and its benefits from the control of elite groups. Such control consistently operates to reinforce elite privilege while pushing marginalized groups farther away from the center of dominant power. Rejecting this normalized state of affairs, bricoleurs commit their knowledge work to helping address the ideological and informational needs of marginalized groups and individuals. As detectives of subjugated insight, bricoleurs eagerly learn from labor struggles, women's marginalization, the "double consciousness" of the racially oppressed, and insurrections against colonialism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999; T. Young & Yarbrough, 1993). In this way, the bricolage hopes to contribute to an evolving criticality.

Thus, the bricolage is dedicated to a form of rigor that is conversant with numerous modes of meaning-making and knowledge production—modes that originate in diverse social locations. These alternative modes of reasoning and researching always consider the relationships, the resonances, and the disjunctions between formal and rationalistic modes of Western epistemology and ontology and different cultural, philosophical, paradigmatic, and subjugated expressions. In these latter expressions, bricoleurs often uncover ways of accessing a concept without resorting to a conventional validated set of prespecified procedures that provide the distance of objectivity (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). This notion of distance fails to take into account the rigor of the

hermeneutical understanding of the way meaning is preinscribed in the act of being in the world, the research process, and objects of research. This absence of hermeneutical awareness undermines the researcher's quest for a thick description and contributes to the production of reduced understandings of the complexity of social life (Paulson, 1995; Selfe & Selfe, 1994).

The multiple perspectives delivered by the concept of difference provide bricoleurs with many benefits. Confrontation with difference helps us to see anew, to move toward the light of epiphany. A basic dimension of an evolving criticality involves a comfort with the existence of alternative ways of analyzing and producing knowledge. This is why it's so important for a historian, for example, to develop an understanding of phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is why it is so important for a social researcher from New York City to understand forms of indigenous African knowledge production. The incongruities between such cultural modes of inquiry are quite valuable, for within the tensions of difference rest insights into multiple dimensions of the research act. Such insights move us to new levels of understanding of the subjects, purposes, and nature of inquiry (Burbules & Beck, 1999; Mayers, 2001; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Willinsky, 2001).

Difference in the bricolage pushes us into the hermeneutic circle as we are induced to deal with parts in their diversity in relation to the whole. Difference may involve culture, class, language, discipline, epistemology, cosmology, ad infinitum. Bricoleurs use one dimension of these multiple diversities to explore others, to generate questions previously unimagined. As we examine these multiple perspectives, we attend to which ones are validated and which ones have been dismissed. Studying such differences, we begin to understand how dominant power operates to exclude and certify particular forms of knowledge production and why. In the criticality of the bricolage, this focus on power and difference always leads us to an awareness of the multiple dimensions of the social. Paulo Freire (1970) referred to this as the need for perceiving social structures and social systems that undermine equal access to resources and power. As bricoleurs answer such questions, we gain new appreciations of the way power tacitly shapes what we know and how we come to know it.

## The Bricolage, a Complex Ontology, and Critical

A central dimension of the bricolage that holds profound implications for critical research is the notion of a critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2003a). As bricoleurs prepare to explore that which is not readily apparent to the ethnographic eye, that realm of complexity in knowledge production that insists on initiating a conversation about what it is that qualitative researchers are observing and interpreting in the world, this clarification of a complex ontology is needed. This conversation is especially important because it hasn't generally taken place. Bricoleurs maintain that this object of inquiry is ontologically complex in that it can't be described as an encapsulated entity. In this more open view, the object of inquiry is always a part of many contexts and processes; it is culturally inscribed and historically situated. The complex view of the object of inquiry accounts for the historical efforts to interpret its meaning in the world and how such efforts continue to define its social, cultural, political, psychological, and educational effects.

In the domain of the qualitative research process, for example, this ontological complexity undermines traditional notions of triangulation. Because of its in-process (processual) nature, inter-researcher reliability becomes far more difficult to achieve. Process-sensitive scholars watch the world flow by like a river in which the exact contents of the water are never the same. Because all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is ever exactly the same as another. Because all physical, social, cultural, psychological, and educational dynamics are connected in a larger fabric, researchers will produce different descriptions of an object of inquiry depending on what part of the fabric they have focused on—what part of the river they have seen. The more

unaware observers are of this type of complexity, the more reductionistic the knowledge they produce about it. Bricoleurs attempt to understand this fabric and the processes that shape it in as thick a way as possible (Blommaert, 1997).

The design and methods used to analyze this social fabric cannot be separated from the way reality is construed. Thus, ontology and epistemology are linked inextricably in ways that shape the task of the researcher. The bricoleur must understand these features in the pursuit of rigor. A deep interdisciplinarity is justified by an understanding of the complexity of the object of inquiry and the demands such complications place on the research act. As parts of complex systems and intricate processes, objects of inquiry are far too mercurial to be viewed by a single way of seeing or as a snapshot of a particular phenomenon at a specific moment in time.

A deep interdisciplinarity seeks to modify the disciplines and the view of research brought to the negotiating table constructed by the bricolage. Everyone leaves the table informed by the dialogue in a way that idiosyncratically influences the research methods they subsequently employ. The point of the interaction is not standardized agreement as to some reductionistic notion of "the proper interdisciplinary research method" but awareness of the diverse tools in the researcher's toolbox. The form such deep interdisciplinarity may take is shaped by the object of inquiry in question. Thus, in the bricolage the context in which research takes place always affects the nature of the deep interdisciplinarity employed. In the spirit of the dialectic of disciplinarity, the ways these context-driven articulations of interdisciplinarity are constructed must be examined in light of the power literacy previously mentioned (Blommaert, 1997; Friedman, 1998; Pryse, 1998; Quintero & Rummel, 2003; T. Young & Yarbrough, 1993).

In social research, the relationship between individuals and their contexts is a central dynamic to be investigated. This relationship is a key ontological and epistemological concern of the bricolage; it is a connection that shapes the identities of human beings and the nature of the complex social fabric. Thus, bricoleurs use multiple methods to analyze the multidimensionality of this type of connection. The ways bricoleurs engage in this process of putting together the pieces of the relationship may provide a different interpretation of its meaning and effects. Recognizing the complex ontological importance of relationships alters the basic foundations of the research act and knowledge production process. Thin reductionistic descriptions of isolated things-in-themselves are no longer sufficient in critical research (Foster, 1997; Zammito, 1996).

What the bricolage is dealing with in this context is a double ontology of complexity: first, the complexity of objects of inquiry and their being-in-the-world; second, the nature of the social construction of human subjectivity, the production of human "being." Such understandings open a new era of social research where the process of becoming human agents is appreciated with a new level of sophistication. The complex feedback loop between an unstable social structure and the individual can be charted in a way that grants human beings insight into the means by which power operates and the democratic process is subverted. In this complex ontological view, bricoleurs understand that social structures do not *determine* individual subjectivity but *constrain* it in remarkably intricate ways. The bricolage is acutely interested in developing and employing a variety of strategies to help specify these ways subjectivity is shaped.

The recognitions that emerge from such a multiperspectival process get analysts beyond the determinism of reductionistic notions of macrosocial structures. The intent of a usable social or educational research is subverted in this reductionistic context, as human agency is erased by the "laws" of society. Structures do not simply "exist" as objective entities whose influence can be predicted or "not exist" with no influence over the cosmos of human affairs. Here fractals enter the stage with their loosely structured characteristics of irregular shape—fractal structures. While not *determining* human behavior, for example, fractal structures possess sufficient order to affect other systems and entities within

their environment. Such structures are never stable or universally present in some uniform manifestation (Varenne, 1996; T. Young & Yarbrough, 1993). The more we study such dynamics, the more diversity of expression we find. Taking this ontological and epistemological diversity into account, bricoleurs understand there are numerous dimensions to the bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As with all aspects of the bricolage, no description is fixed and final, and all features of the bricolage come with an elastic clause.

## ■ Critical Research in a Globalized, Privatized World

A critical postmodern research requires researchers to construct their perception of the world anew, not just in random ways but in a manner that undermines what appears natural, that opens to question what appears obvious (Slaughter, 1989). Oppositional and insurgent researchers as maieutic agents must not confuse their research efforts with the textual suavities of an avant-garde academic posturing in which they are awarded the sinecure of representation for the oppressed without actually having to return to those working-class communities where their studies took place. Rather, they need to locate their work in a transformative praxis that leads to the alleviation of suffering and the overcoming of oppression.

Rejecting the arrogant reading of metropolitan critics and their imperial mandates governing research, insurgent researchers ask questions about how what is has come to be, whose interests are served by particular institutional arrangements, and where our own frames of reference come from. Facts are no longer simply "what is"; the truth of beliefs is not simply testable by their correspondence to these facts. To engage in research grounded on an evolving criticality is to take part in a process of critical world-making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason. The obstacles that critical research has yet to overcome in terms of a frontal assault against the ravages of global capitalism, the new American Empire and its devastation of the global working class, has led McLaren to a more sustained and sympathetic engagement with Marx and the Marxist tradition.

One significant area of concern that has been addressed in the recent Marxist work of McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2004) and Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres (2004) is that of critical pedagogy and its intersection with critical multiculturalism, especially with respect to the influence that critical race theory has had on recent work in these interconnected domains. Darder and Torres (2004) point to the fact that much of the work within critical race theory is grounded in the popular intersectionality argument of the post-structuralist and post-modernist era that stipulates that race, class, gender, and sexual orientation should all receive equal attention in understanding the social order and the institutions and ideologies that constitute it. That is, various oppressions are to be engaged with equal weight as one ascribes pluralized sensibilities to any political project that theorizes about social inequalities (2004).

This reduces capitalist exploitation and relations of capitalist production to one set of relations, among others, that systematically denies the totality of capitalism that is constitutive of the process of racialized class relations. This is not to argue that the pernicious ideology of racism is not integral to the process of capitalist accumulation but, as Darder and Torres argue, it is to antiseptically separate politics and economics as distinct spheres of power or ensembles of social relations. Rather than focus on race, or raced identity (i.e., shared phenotypical traits or cultural attributes), Darder and Torres make the case for concentrating upon the ideology of racism and racialized class relations within a larger materialist understanding of the world, thereby bringing the analysis of political economy to the center of the debate.

In a similar fashion, McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2004) argue that the separation of the economic and the political within current contributions of multiculturalism premised on

identity politics has had the effect of replacing a *historical materialist class analysis* with a *cultural analysis of class*. As a result, many critical race theorists as well as post-Marxists writing in the realm of cultural studies have also stripped the idea of class of precisely that element which, for Marx, made it radical—namely its status as a universal form of exploitation whose abolition required (and was also central to) the abolition of all manifestations of oppression (Marx, 1978, p. 60). With regard to this issue, Kovel (2002) is particularly insightful, for he explicitly addresses an issue that continues to vex the Left—namely the priority given to different categories of what he calls "dominative splitting"—those categories of gender, class, race, ethnic and national exclusion, and so on.

Kovel argues that we need to ask the question of *priority* with respect to what? He notes that if we mean priority with respect to time, then the category of gender would have priority because there are traces of gender oppression in all other forms of oppression. If we were to prioritize in terms of existential significance, Kovel suggests that we would have to depend on the immediate historical forces that bear down on distinct groups of people—he offers examples of Jews in 1930s Germany who suffered from brutal forms of anti-Semitism and Palestinians today who experience anti-Arab racism under Israeli domination. The question of what has political priority, however, would depend on which transformation of relations of oppression are practically more urgent, and while this would certainly depend upon the preceding categories, it would also depend on the fashion in which all the forces acting in a concrete situation are deployed.

As to the question of which split sets into motion all the others, the priority would have to be given to *class* because class relations entail the state as an instrument of enforcement and control, and it is the state that shapes and organizes the splits that appear in human ecosystems. Thus, class is both logically and historically distinct from other forms of exclusion (hence, we should not talk of "classism" to go along with "sexism" and "racism," and "species-ism"). This is, first of all, because class is an essentially human-made category, without root in even a mystified biology. We cannot imagine a human world without gender distinctions—although we can imagine a world without domination by gender. But a world without class is eminently imaginable—indeed, such was the human world for the great majority of our species's time on earth, during all of which considerable fuss was made over gender. Historically, the difference arises because "class" signifies one side of a larger figure that includes a state apparatus whose conquests and regulations create races and shape gender relations. Thus, there will be no true resolution of racism so long as class society stands, inasmuch as a racially oppressed society implies the activities of a class-defending state. Nor can gender inequality be enacted away so long as class society, with its state, demands the super-exploitation of women's labor (Kovel, 2002).

## ■ Rethinking Class and Class Consciousness

Recently, McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2004) have reexamined some of the ethnographic and conceptual work of Paul Willis (1977, 1978, 2000; Willis, Jones, Canman, & Hurd, 1990) in an attempt to rethink a research agenda involving the participation of working-class subjects and constituencies. We believe that ethnographic models of research such as those developed by Willis would best serve the interests of the working class if they could be accompanied by a larger strategy for socialist transformation, one that proceeds from an assessment of the objective factors and capabilities latent in the current conditions of class struggle. McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale maintain that the worldwide social movement against anticorporate globalization, as well as the anti-imperialist/antiwar movements preceding and following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, have provided new contexts (mostly through left-wing independent publications and resources on the Internet) for enabling various publics (and non-publics beyond the institutions that serve

majority groups) to become more critically literate about the relationship between current world events, global capitalism, and imperialism. For many researchers and educators on the left, this will require a socialist "education" of working-class consciousness. This, in turn, means challenging the mediated social forms in which we live and learn to labor.

One way of scrutinizing the production of everyday meanings so that they are less likely to provide ballast to capitalist social relations is to study working-class consciousness. Bertell Ollman (1971, 1993, 2003) has developed a systematic approach to dialectics that can be brought to bear on the study of working-class consciousness. Such an approach is in need of serious consideration by progressive researchers, especially because most current studies of working-class consciousness have been derived from non-Marxist approaches. Ollman (1993) advises that class consciousness is much more than individual consciousness writ large. The subject of class consciousness is, after all, class. Viewing class consciousness from the perspective of the labor theory of value and the materialist conception of history, as undertaken in Ollman's account, stipulates that we view class in the context of the overall integrated functions of capital and wage labor.

Although people can certainly be seen from the functionalist perspective as embodiments of social-economic functions, we need to expand this view and understand the subjective dimensions of class and class consciousness. Ollman follows Marx's advice in recommending that in defining "class" or any other important notion, we begin from the whole and proceed to the part (see also Ilyenkov, 1977, 1982a, 1982b). According to McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2004), class must be conceived as a complex social relation in the context of Marx's dialectical approach to social life. (This discussion is based on McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale [2004].) It is important in this regard to see class as a function (from the perspective of the place of a function within the system), as a group (qualities that are attributed to people such as race and gender), and as a complex relation (that is, as the abstracted common element in the social relationship of alienated individuals). A class involves, therefore, the alienated quality of the social life of individuals who function in a certain way within the system. The salient features of class—alienated social relation, place/function, and group—are all mutually dependent.

Class as function relates to the objective interests of workers; class as group relates to their subjective interests. Subjective interests refer to what workers actually believe to be in their own best interests. Those practices that serve the workers in their function as wage laborers refer to their objective interests. Ollman summarizes class consciousness as

> one's identity and interests (subjective and objective) as members of a class, something of the dynamics of capitalism uncovered by Marx (at least enough to grasp objective interests), the broad outlines of the class struggle and where one fits into it, feelings of solidarity toward one's own class and of rational hostility toward opposition classes (in contrast to the feelings of mutual indifference and inner-class competition that accompany alienation), and the vision of a more democratic and egalitarian society that is not only possible but that one can help bring about. (1993, p. 155)

Ollman underscores importantly the notion that explaining class consciousness stipulates seeking what is not present in the thinking of workers as well as what is present. It is an understanding that is "appropriate to the objective character of a class and its objective interests" (1993, p. 155). But in addition to the objective aspect of class consciousness, we must include the subjective aspect of class consciousness, which Ollman describes as "the consciousness of the group of people in a class in so far as their understanding of who they are and what must be done develops from its economistic beginnings toward the consciousness that is appropriate to their class situation" (1993, p. 155). But what is different between this subjective consciousness and the actual consciousness of each individual in the group? Ollman writes that subjective consciousness is different from the actual consciousness of the individual in the group in the following three ways:

> (1) It is a group consciousness, a way of thinking and a thought content, that develops through the individuals in the group interacting with each other and with opposing groups in situations that are peculiar to the class; (2) it is a consciousness that has its main point of reference in the situation and objective interests of a class, viewed functionally, and not in the declared subjective interests of class members (the imputed class consciousness referred to above has been given a role here in the thinking of real people); and (3) it is in its essence a process, a movement from wherever a group begins in its consciousness of itself to the consciousness appropriate to its situation. In other words, the process of becoming class conscious is not external to what it is but rather at the center of what it is all about. (1993, p. 155)

Class consciousness is therefore something that Ollman describes as "a kind of 'group think,' a collective, interactive approach to recognizing, labeling, coming to understand, and acting upon the particular world class members have in common" (1993, p. 156). Class consciousness is different from individual consciousness in the sense of "having its main point of reference in the situation of the class and not in the already recognized interests of individuals" (1993, p. 157). Class consciousness is something that exists "in potential" in the sense that it represents "the appropriate consciousness of people in that position, the consciousness that maximizes their chances of realizing class interests, including structural change where such change is required to secure other interests" (1993, p. 157). Ollman stresses that class consciousness "exists in potential," that is, "class consciousness is a consciousness waiting to happen" (1993, p. 187). It is important here not to mistake class consciousness as some kind of "abstract potential" because it is "rooted in a situation unfolding before our very eyes, long before understanding of real people catches up with it" (1993, p. 157). Class consciousness, then, is not something that is fixed or permanent but is always in motion. The very situatedness of the class establishes its goal—it is always in the process of becoming itself, if we understand the notion of process dialectically. Consequently, we need to examine class from the perspective of Marx's philosophy of internal relations, as that "which treats the relations in which anything stands as essential parts of what it is, so that a significant change in any of these relations registers as a qualitative change in the system of which it is a part" (Ollman, 2003, p. 85).

## ■ Focusing on Critical Ethnography

As critical researchers attempt to get behind the curtain, to move beyond assimilated experience, to expose the way ideology constrains the desire for self-direction, and to confront the way power reproduces itself in the construction of human consciousness, they employ a plethora of research methodologies. In this context, Patti Lather (1991, 1993) extends our position with her notion of catalytic validity. Catalytic validity points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it. Noncritical researchers who operate within an empiricist framework will perhaps find catalytic validity to be a strange concept. Research that possesses catalytic validity will not only display the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process; it will also direct this impact so that those under study will gain self-understanding and self-direction.

Theory that falls under the rubric of *postcolonialism* (see McLaren, 1999; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999) involves important debates over the knowing subject and object of analysis. Such works have initiated important new modes of analysis, especially in relation to questions of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Recent attempts by critical researchers to move beyond the objectifying and imperialist gaze associated with the Western anthropological tradition (which fixes the image of the so-called informant from the colonizing perspective of the knowing subject), although laudatory and well-intentioned, are not without their shortcomings (Bourdieu & Wacquaat, 1992). As Fuchs (1993) has so presciently observed, serious limitations plague recent efforts to develop a more reflective

approach to ethnographic writing. The challenge here can be summarized in the following questions: How does the knowing subject come to know the Other? How can researchers respect the perspective of the Other and invite the Other to speak (Abdullah & Stringer, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995; Brock-Utne, 1996; Goldie, 1995; Macedo, 1994; Myrsiades & Myrsiades, 1998; Pieterse & Parekh, 1995; Prakash & Esteva, 1998; Rains, 1998; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Viergever, 1999)?

Although recent confessional modes of ethnographic writing attempt to treat so-called informants as "participants" in an attempt to avoid the objectification of the Other (usually referring to the relationship between Western anthropologists and non-Western culture), there is a risk that uncovering colonial and postcolonial structures of domination may, in fact, unintentionally validate and consolidate such structures as well as reassert liberal values through a type of covert ethnocentrism. Fuchs (1993) warns that the attempt to subject researchers to the same approach to which other societies are subjected could lead to an " 'othering' of one's own world" (p. 108). Such an attempt often fails to question existing ethnographic methodologies and therefore unwittingly extends their validity and applicability while further objectifying the world of the researcher. Michel Foucault's approach to this dilemma is to "detach" social theory from the epistemology of his own culture by criticizing the traditional philosophy of reflection. However, Foucault falls into the trap of ontologizing his own methodological argumentation and erasing the notion of prior understanding that is linked to the idea of an "inside" view (Fuchs, 1993). Louis Dumont fares somewhat better by arguing that cultural texts need to be viewed simultaneously from the inside and from the outside.

However, in trying to affirm a "reciprocal interpretation of various societies among themselves" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 113) through identifying both transindividual structures of consciousness and transsubjective social structures, Dumont aspires to a universal framework for the comparative analysis of societies. Whereas Foucault and Dumont attempt to "transcend the categorical foundations of their own world" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 118) by refusing to include themselves in the process of objectification, Pierre Bourdieu integrates himself as a social actor into the social field under analysis. Bourdieu achieves such integration by "epistemologizing the ethnological content of his own presuppositions" (Fuchs, 1993, p. 121). But the self-objectification of the observer (anthropologist) is not unproblematic. Fuchs (1993) notes, after Bourdieu, that the chief difficulty is "forgetting the difference between the theoretical and the practical relationship with the world and of imposing on the object the theoretical relationship one maintains with it" (p. 120). Bourdieu's approach to re-search does not fully escape becoming, to a certain extent, a "confirmation of objectivism," but at least there is an earnest attempt by the researcher to reflect on the preconditions of his or her own self-understanding—an attempt to engage in an "ethnography of ethnographers" (p. 122).

Postmodern ethnography often intersects—to varying degrees—with the concerns of postcolonialist researchers, but the degree to which it fully addresses issues of exploitation and the social relations of capitalist exploitation remains questionable. Postmodern ethnography—and we are thinking here of works such as Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977), James Boon's *Other Tribes, Other Scribes* (1982), and Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (1987)—shares the conviction articulated by Marc Manganaro (1990) that "no anthropology is apolitical, removed from ideology and hence from the capacity to be affected by or, as crucially, to effect social formations. The question ought not to be if an anthropological text is political, but rather, what kind of sociopolitical affiliations are tied to particular anthropological texts" (p. 35).

Judith Newton and Judith Stacey (1992–1993) note that the current postmodern textual experimentation of ethnography credits the "post-colonial predicament of culture as the opportunity for anthropology to reinvent itself" (p. 56). Modernist ethnography, according to

these authors, "constructed authoritative cultural accounts that served, however inadvertently, not only to establish the authority of the Western ethnographer over native others but also to sustain Western authority over colonial cultures" (p. 56). They argue (following James Clifford) that ethnographers can and should try to escape the recurrent allegorical genre of colonial ethnography—the pastoral, a nostalgic, redemptive text that preserves a primitive culture on the brink of extinction for the historical record of its Western conquerors. The narrative structure of this "salvage text" portrays the native culture as a coherent, authentic, and lamentably "evading past," whereas its complex, inauthentic, Western successors represent the future (p. 56).

Postmodern ethnographic writing faces the challenge of moving beyond simply the reanimation of local experience, an uncritical celebration of cultural difference (including figural differentiations within the ethnographer's own culture), and the employment of a framework that espouses universal values and a global role for interpretivist anthropology (Silverman, 1990). What we have described as resistance postmodernism can help qualitative researchers challenge dominant Western research practices that are underwritten by a foundational epistemology and a claim to universally valid knowledge at the expense of local, subjugated knowledges (Peters, 1993). The choice is not one between modernism and postmodernism, but one of whether or not to challenge the presuppositions that inform the normalizing judgments one makes as a researcher.

Vincent Crapanzano (1990) warns that "the anthropologist can assume neither the Orphic lyre nor the crown of thorns, although I confess to hear salvationist echoes" in his desire to protect his people (p. 301).

Connor (1992) describes the work of James Clifford, which shares an affinity with ethnographic work associated with Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and the College de Sociologie, as not simply the "writing of culture" but rather "the interior disruption of categories of art and culture correspond[ing] to a radically dialogic form of ethnographic writing, which takes place across and between cultures" (p. 251). Clifford (1992) describes his own work as an attempt "to multiply the hands and discourses involved in 'writing culture' . . . not to assert a naïve democracy of plural authorship, but to loosen at least somewhat the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist and to open for discussion ethnography's hierarchy and negotiation of discourses in power-charged, unequal situations" (p. 100). Citing the work of Marcus and Fischer (1986), Clifford warns against modernist ethnographic practices of "representational essentializing" and "metonymic freezing" in which one aspect of a group's life is taken to represent the group as a whole; instead, Clifford urges forms of multilocale ethnography to reflect the "transnational political, economic and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds" (p. 102). Rather than culture being fixed into reified textual portraits, it needs to be better understood as displacement, transplantation, disruption, positionality, and difference.

Although critical ethnography allows, in a way conventional ethnography does not, for the relationship of liberation and history, and although its hermeneutical task is to call into question the social and cultural conditioning of human activity and the prevailing sociopolitical structures, we do not claim that this is enough to restructure the social system. But it is certainly, in our view, a necessary beginning. We follow Patricia Ticineto Clough (1992) in arguing that "realist narrativity has allowed empirical social science to be the platform and horizon of social criticism" (p. 135). Ethnography needs to be analyzed critically not only in terms of its field methods but also as reading and writing practices. Data collection must give way to "rereadings of representations in every form" (p. 137). In the narrative construction of its authority as empirical science, ethnography needs to face the unconscious processes upon which it justifies its canonical formulations, processes that often involve the disavowal of oedipal or authorial desire and the reduction of differences to binary oppositions. Within these processes of binary reduction, the male ethnographer is most often privileged as the

guardian of "the factual representation of empirical positivities" (Clough, 1992, p. 9).

## New Questions Concerning Validity in Critical Ethnography

Critical research traditions have arrived at the point where they recognize that claims to truth are always discursively situated and implicated in relations of power. Yet, unlike some claims made within "ludic" strands of postmodernist research, we do not suggest that because we cannot know truth absolutely, truth can simply be equated with an effect of power. We say this because truth involves regulative rules that must be met for some statements to be more meaningful than others. Otherwise, truth becomes meaningless and, if that is the case, liberatory praxis has no purpose other than to win for the sake of winning. As Phil Carspecken (1993, 1999) remarks, every time we act, in every instance of our behavior, we presuppose some normative or universal relation to truth. Truth is internally related to meaning in a pragmatic way through normative referenced claims, intersubjective referenced claims, subjective referenced claims, and the way we deictically ground or anchor meaning in our daily lives. Carspecken explains that researchers are able to articulate the normative evaluative claims of others when they begin to see them in the same way as their participants by living inside the cultural and discursive positionalities that inform such claims.

Claims to universality must be recognized in each particular normative claim, and questions must be raised about whether such norms represent the entire group. When the limited claim of universality is seen to be contradictory to the practices under observation, power relations become visible. What is crucial here, according to Carspecken, is that researchers recognize where they are located ideologically in the normative and identity claims of others and at the same time be honest about their own subjective referenced claims and not let normative evaluative claims interfere with what they observe. Critical research continues to problematize normative and universal claims in a way that does not permit them to be analyzed outside a politics of representation, divorced from the material conditions in which they are produced, or outside a concern with the constitution of the subject in the very acts of reading and writing.

In his book *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research* (1996), Carspecken addresses the issue of critical epistemology, an understanding of the relationship between power and thought, and power and truth claims. In a short exposition of what is "critical" to critical epistemology, he debunks facile forms of social constructivism and offers a deft criticism of mainstream epistemologies by way of Continental phenomenology, poststructuralism, and postmodernist social theory, mainly the work of Edmund Husserl and Jacques Derrida. Carspecken makes short work of facile forms of constructivist thought, purporting that what we see is strongly influenced by what we already value and that criticalist research simply indulges itself in the "correct" political values. For instance, some constructivists argue that all that criticalists need to do is to "bias" their work in the direction of social justice.

This form of constructivist thought is not viable, according to Carspecken, because it is plainly ocular-centric; that is, it depends upon visual perception to form the basis of its theory. Rather than rely on perceptual metaphors found in mainstream ethnographic accounts, critical ethnography, in contrast, should emphasize communicative experiences and structures as well as cultural typifications. Carspecken argues that critical ethnography needs to differentiate among ontological categories (i.e., subjective, objective, normative-evaluative) rather than adopt the position of "multiple realities" defended by many constructivists. He adopts a principled position that research value orientations should not determine research findings, as much as this is possible. Rather, critical ethnographers should employ a critical epistemology; that is, they should uphold epistemological principles that apply to all researchers. In fecundating this claim, Carspecken rehabilitates critical ethnography from many of

the misperceptions of its critics who believe that it ignores questions of validity.

To construct a socially critical epistemology, critical ethnographers need to understand holistic modes of human experience and their relationship to communicative structures. Preliminary stages of this process that Carspecken articulates include examining researcher bias and discovering researcher value orientations. Following stages include compiling the primary record through the collection of monological data, preliminary reconstructive analysis, dialogical data generation, discovering social systems relations, and using systems relations to explain findings. Anthony Giddens's work forms the basis of Carspecken's approach to systems analysis. Accompanying discussions of each of the complex stages Carspecken develops are brilliantly articulated approaches to horizontal and vertical validity reconstructions and pragmatic horizons of analysis. In order to help link theory to practice, Carspecken uses data from his study of an inner-city Houston elementary school program that is charged with helping students learn conflict management skills.

Another impressive feature is Carspecken's exposition and analysis of communicative acts, especially his discussion of meaning as embodiment and understanding as intersubjective, not objective or subjective. Carspecken works from a view of intersubjectivity that combines Hegel, Mead, Habermas, and Taylor. He recommends that critical ethnographers record body language carefully because the meaning of an action is not in the language, it is rather in the action and the actor's bodily states. In Carspecken's view, subjectivity is derivative from intersubjectivity (as is objectivity), and intersubjectivity involves the dialogical constitution of the "feeling body." Finally, Carspecken stresses the importance of macro-level social theories, environmental conditions, socially structured ways of meeting needs and desires, effects of cultural commodities on students, economic exploitation, and political and cultural conditions of action. Much of Carspecken's inspiration for his approach to validity claims is taken from Habermas's theory of communicative action. Carspecken reads Habermas as grasping the prelinguistic foundations of language and intersubjectivity, making language secondary to the concept of intersubjectivity.

Yet Carspecken departs from a strict Habermasian view of action by bringing in an expressive/praxis model roughly consistent with Charles Taylor's work. Although Habermas and Taylor frequently argue against each other's positions, Carspecken puts them together in a convincing manner. Taylor's emphasis on holistic modes of understanding and the act constitution that Carspecken employs make it possible to link the theory of communicative rationality to work on embodied meaning and the metaphoric basis of meaningful action. It also provides a means for synthesizing Giddens's ideas on part/whole relations, virtual structure, and act constitution with communicative rationality. This is another way in which Carspecken's work differs from Habermas and yet remains consistent with his theory and the internal link between meaning and validity.

## ■ Recent Innovations in Critical Ethnography

In addition to Carspecken's brilliant insights into critically grounded ethnography, the late 1990s witnessed a proliferation of deconstructive approaches as well as reflexive approaches (this discussion is based on Trueba and McLaren [2000]). In her important book *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994), Kamala Visweswaran maintains that reflexive ethnography, like normative ethnography, rests on the "declarative mode" of imparting knowledge to a reader whose identity is anchored in a shared discourse.

Deconstructive ethnography, in contrast, enacts the "interrogative mode" through a constant deferral or a refusal to explain or interpret. Within deconstructive ethnography, the identity of the reader with a unified subject of enunciation is discouraged. Whereas reflexive ethnography maintains that the ethnographer is not separate from the object of investigation, the ethnographer is still viewed as a unified subject of knowledge that can make hermeneutic efforts to establish identification

between the observer and the observed (as in modernist interpretive traditions). Deconstructive ethnography, in contrast, often disrupts such identification in favor of articulating a fractured, destabilized, multiply positioned subjectivity (as in postmodernist interpretive traditions). Whereas reflexive ethnography questions its own authority, deconstructive ethnography forfeits its authority.

Both approaches to critical ethnography can be used to uncover the clinging Eurocentric authority employed by ethnographers in the study of Latino/a populations. The goal of both these approaches is criticalist in nature: that is, to free the object of analysis from the tyranny of fixed, unassailable categories and to rethink subjectivity itself as a permanently unclosed, always partial, narrative engagement with text and context. Such an approach can help the ethnographer to caution against the damaging depictions propagated by Anglo observers about Mexican immigrants. As Ruth Behar (1993) notes, in classical sociological and ethnographic accounts of the Mexican and Mexican American family, stereotypes similar to those surrounding the black family perpetuated images of the authoritarian, oversexed, and macho husband and the meek and submissive wife surrounded by children who adore their good and suffering mother. These stereotypes have come under strong critique in the last few years, particularly by Chicana critics, who have sought to go beyond the various "deficiency theories" that continue to mark the discussion of African American and Latino/a family life (p. 276).

The conception of culture advanced by critical ethnographers generally unpacks culture as a complex circuit of production that includes myriad dialectically reinitiating and mutually informing sets of activities such as routines, rituals, action conditions, systems of intelligibility and meaning-making, conventions of interpretation, systems relations, and conditions both external and internal to the social actor (Carspecken, 1996). In her ethnographic study *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996), Kathleen Stewart cogently illustrates the ambivalent character of culture, as well as its fluidity and ungraspable multilayeredness, when she remarks:

> Culture, as it is seen through its productive forms and means of mediation, is not, then, reducible to a fixed body of social value and belief or a direct precipitant of lived experience in the world but grows into a space on the side of the road where stories weighted with sociality take on a life of their own. We "see" it . . . only by building up multilayered narratives of the poetic in the everyday life of things. We represent it only by roaming from one texted genre to another—romantic, realist, historical, fantastic, sociological, surreal. There is no final textual solution, no way of resolving the dialogic of the interpreter/interpreted or subject/object through efforts to "place" ourselves in the text, or to represent "the fieldwork experience," or to gather up the voices of the other as if they could speak for themselves. (p. 210)

According to E. San Juan (1996), a renewed understanding of culture—as both discursive and material—becomes the linchpin for any emancipatory politics. San Juan writes that the idea of culture as social processes and practices that are thoroughly grounded in material social relations—in the systems of maintenance (economics), decision (politics), learning and communication (culture), and generation and nurture (the domain of social reproduction)—must be the grounding principle, or paradigm if you like, of any progressive and emancipatory approach (p. 177; Gresson, 1995). Rejecting the characterization of anthropologists as either "adaptationalists" (e.g., Marvin Harris) or "ideationalists" (e.g., cognitivists, Lévi-Straussian structuralists, Schneiderian symbolists, Geertzian interpretivists), E. Valentine Daniel remarks in his recent ethnography *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (1996) that culture is "no longer something out there to be discovered, described, and explained, but rather something into which the ethnographer, as interpreter, enter[s]" (p. 198). Culture, in other words, is cocreated by the anthropologist and informant through conversation. Yet even this semeiosic conceptualization of culture is not without its problems. As Daniel himself notes, even if one considers oneself to be a "culture-comaking processualist," in contrast to a "culture-finding essentialist,"

one still has to recognize that one is working within a logocentric tradition that, to a greater or lesser extent, privileges words over actions.

Critical ethnography has benefited from this new understanding of culture and from the new hybridic possibilities for cultural critique that have been opened up by the current blurring and mixing of disciplinary genres—those that emphasize experience, subjectivity, reflexivity, and dialogical understanding. The advantage that follows such perspectives is that social life is not viewed as preontologically available for the researcher to study. It also follows that there is no perspective unspoiled by ideology from which to study social life in an antiseptically objective way. What is important to note here is the stress placed on the ideological situatedness of any descriptive or socioanalytic account of social life. Critical ethnographers such as John and Jean Comaroff (1992) have made significant contributions to our understanding of the ways in which power is entailed in culture, leading to practices of domination and exploitation that have become naturalized in everyday social life. According to Comaroff and Comaroff, hegemony refers to "that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it" (p. 23). These axiomatic and yet ineffable discourses and practices that are presumptively shared become "ideological" precisely when their internal contradictions are revealed, uncovered, and viewed as arbitrary and negotiable. Ideology, then, refers to a highly articulated worldview, master narrative, discursive regime, or organizing scheme for collective symbolic production. The dominant ideology is the expression of the dominant social group.

Following this line of argument, hegemony "is nonnegotiable and therefore beyond direct argument," whereas ideology "is more susceptible to being perceived as a matter of inimical opinion and interest and therefore is open to contestation" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992, p. 24). Ideologies become the expressions of specific groups, whereas hegemony refers to conventions and constructs that are shared and naturalized throughout a political community. Hegemony works both through silences and through repetition in naturalizing the dominant worldview. There also may exist oppositional ideologies among subordinate or subaltern groups—whether well formed or loosely articulated—that break free of hegemony. In this way, hegemony is never total or complete; it is always porous.

## ■ Critical Research, 9/11, and the Effort to Make Sense of the American Empire in the 21st Century

The dominant power of these economic dynamics has been reinforced by post-9/11 military moves by the United States. Critical researchers cannot escape the profound implications of these geopolitical, economic, social, cultural, and epistemological issues for the future of knowledge production and distribution. An evolving criticality is keenly aware of these power dynamics and the way they embed themselves in all dimensions of the issues examined here. In this context, it is essential that critical researchers work to expose these disturbing dynamics to both academic and general audiences. In many ways, 9/11 was a profound shock to millions of Americans who obtain their news and worldviews from the mainstream, corporately owned media and their understanding of American international relations from what is taught in most secondary schools and in many colleges and universities. Such individuals are heard frequently on call-in talk radio and TV shows expressing the belief that America is loved internationally because it is richer, more moral, and more magnanimous than other nations. In this mind-set, those who resist the United States hate its freedom for reasons never quite specified. These Americans, the primary victims of a right-wing corporate-government produced miseducation (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004), have not been informed by their news sources of the societies

that have been undermined by covert U.S. military operations and U.S. economic policies (Parenti, 2002). Many do not believe, for example, the description of the human effects of American sanctions on Iraq between the first and second Gulf Wars. Indeed, the hurtful activities of the American Empire are invisible to many of the empire's subjects in the United States itself.

The complexity of the relationship between the West (the United States in particular) and the Islamic world demands that we be very careful in laying out the argument we are making about this cultural pedagogy, this miseducation. The activities of the American Empire have not been the only forces at work creating an islamist extremism that violently defies the sacred teaching of the religion. But American misdeeds have played an important role in the process. A new critical orientation toward knowledge production and research based on an appreciation of difference can help the United States redress some of its past and present policies toward the diverse Islamic world. Although these policies have been invisible to many Americans, they are visible to the rest of the world—the Islamic world in particular. Ignoring the *history* of the empire, Kenneth Weinstein (2002) writes in the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation's (2002) *September 11: What Our Children Need to Know* that the Left "admits" that differences exist between cultures but paradoxically downplays their violent basis through relativism and multiculturalism. It views cultural diversity and national differences as matters of taste, arguing that the greatest crime of all is judgmentalism. Weinstein concludes this paragraph by arguing that Americans are just too nice and, as such, are naïve to the threats posed by many groups around the world.

The Fordham Foundation's *September 11: What Our Children Need to Know* (2002) is right-wing educator Chester Finn's epistle to the nation about the incompetence of U.S. educators. The report's list of contributors is a virtual who's who of the theorists of the 21st-century American Empire, including the wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, Lynne Cheney, as well as William Bennett. Critical researchers should be aware of the politics of knowledge operating in this well-financed discreditation of thoughtful educators. As Finn puts it, he had to act because so much "nonsense" was being put out by the educational establishment. What Finn describes as nonsense can be read as scholarship attempting to provide perspective on the long history of Western-Islamic relations. Finn's use of "so much" in relation to this "nonsense" is crass exaggeration. Most materials published about 9/11 for educators were rather innocuous pleas for helping children deal with the anxiety produced by the attacks. Little elementary or secondary school material devoted to historicizing or contextualizing the Islamic world and its relation with the West appeared in the first 2 years after the tragic events of 9/11.

Kenneth Weinstein and many other Fordham authors set up a classic straw man argument in this context. The Left that is portrayed by them equates difference with a moral relativism that is unable to condemn the inhumane activities of particular groups. Implicit throughout *September 11: What Our Children Need to Know* is the notion that this fictional American Left does not condemn al-Qaeda and its crimes against humanity. It is the type of distortion that equated opposition to the second Gulf War with support for Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime. How can these malcontents oppose America, the Fordham authors ask. Their America is a new empire that constantly denies its imperial dimensions. The new empire is not like empires in previous historical eras that overtly boasted of conquest and the taking of colonies. The 21st century is the era of the postmodern empire that speaks of its moral duty to unselfishly liberate nations and return power to the people. Empire leaders speak of free markets, the rights of the people, and the domino theory of democracy. The new American Empire employs public relations people to portray it as the purveyor of freedom around the world. When its acts of liberation and restoration of democracy elicit protest and retaliation, its leaders express shock and disbelief that such benevolent actions could arouse such "irrational" responses.

In Joe Kincheloe's chapter on Iran in *The Miseducation of the West: Constructing Islam* (2004), he

explores the inability of American leaders to understand the impact of empire building in the Persian Gulf on the psyches of those personally affected by such activities. Indeed, the American public was ignorant of covert U.S. operations that overthrew the democratically elected government of Iran so a totalitarian regime more sympathetic to the crass needs of the American Empire could be installed. The citizens of Iran and other peoples around the Muslim world, however, were acutely aware of this imperial action and the contempt for Muslims it implied. When this was combined with a plethora of other U.S. political, military, and economic initiatives in the region, their view of America was less than positive. In the case of Iraq in the second Gulf War, American leaders simply disregarded the views of nations around the world, the Muslim world in particular, as they expressed their opposition to the American invasion. History was erased as Saddam Hussein was viewed in a psychological context as a madman. References to times when the United States supported the madman were deleted from memory. The empire, thus, could do whatever it wanted, regardless of its impact on the Iraqi people or the perceptions of others (irrational others) around the world. An epistemological naïveté—the belief that dominant American ways of seeing both itself and the world are rational and objective and that differing perspectives are irrational—permeate the official information of the empire (Abukhattala, 2004; Kellner, 2004; Progler, 2004; Steinberg, 2004). As John Agresto (2002) writes in the Fordham report:

> It is not very helpful to understand other cultures and outlooks and not understand our own country and what it has tried to achieve. What is it that has brought tens of millions of immigrants to America, not to bomb it, but to better its future and their own? What is it about the promise of liberty and equal treatment, of labor that benefits you and your neighbor, of an open field for your enterprise, ambition, determination and pluck? *Try not to look at America through the lens of your own ideology or political preference but see it as it really is.* Try, perhaps, to see the America most American see. That can be a fine antidote to smugness and academic self-righteousness. (emphasis ours)

Studying the Fordham Foundation's ways of looking at and teaching about America with its erasures of history deployed in the very name of a call to teach history, we are disturbed. When this is combined with an analysis of media representations of the nation's war against terrorism and the second Gulf War in Iraq, we gain some sobering insights into America's future. The inability or refusal of many Americans, especially those in power, to see the problematic activities of the "invisible" empire does not portend peace in the world in the coming years. The way knowledge is produced and transmitted in the United States by a corporatized media and an increasingly corporatized/privatized educational system is one of the central political issues of our time. Yet, in the mainstream political and educational conversations it is not even on the radar. A central task of critical researchers must involve putting these politics of knowledge on the public agenda. The power literacies and the concern with social change delineated in our discussion of critical theoretical research have never been more important to the world.

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